

A Sermon  
Rev. W. Kevin Holder  
Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
May 22, 2022

## **Peace I Leave with You**

John 14:25-31

"Peace I leave with you." These words from our Lord have been recited, read, said, sung, prayed, and practiced for centuries. Across time, the Holy Spirit has been taking these words and reminding us of what Jesus said and why it matters. And here today, these words come to us again. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (v. 27).

Jesus' disciples were understandably afraid. They were especially fearful about the future. Our text for today is part of a larger section of John in which Jesus is getting his disciples ready for his impending departure. On the night before his death, Jesus gives them words of assurance and promise. His disciples were distressed that Jesus would be leaving this world in order to take up residence with the Father. Remember that Jesus was their point of access to God. He was their flesh and blood way of knowing God and having communion with God. So what would happen once Jesus was gone? What would this mean for their relationship with God and with one another? But Jesus wants to help them see that it's actually for their good that he suffer, die, be raised, and eventually return to the Father. This would open the way to eternal life, to their participation in the communion between God and Jesus.

In the verses leading up to today's text, Jesus promises the disciples that he will not leave them orphaned. The term for "orphan" was a common metaphor to describe disciples left without a master. Plus, Jesus has already spoken of them as "little children" (13:13). Put this type of language in the mix with other imagery that Jesus has used, and you can hear him reassuring his disciples that their bond won't be severed by his departure. They'll still be family, even if he's not physically present in the same way they've had him with them up to this point.

That's where the Holy Spirit comes into the picture. In our text, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "the Counselor" (v. 25). The Greek term refers to one "called along beside." In other words, the Father will send the Holy Spirit to be alongside the disciples, to teach them and remind them of all that Jesus has said to them. The Holy Spirit is Jesus' way of being present with the community of his followers, then and now. So we need not be anxious.

And yet we are. We're anxious about many things. Our anxieties are connected to our fears. Now granted, the two aren't necessarily identical. Fear usually has an identifiable source. That source may be real or not, but at least we can put our finger on it and name it. In that respect, fear can be a good thing. It helps us identify real or potential threats and take the action necessary to prepare ourselves or protect ourselves.

But anxiety is somewhat different. As one person has put it, "Anxiety is more murky and less identifiable. Anxiety is a free-floating feeling of uneasiness that has no specific object."<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, though, anxiety can settle onto a specific object or situation. The bottom line is that fear and anxiety, though distinct, are related and connected. They shape

our daily lives in many ways, whether we're always aware of it or not. According to one author:

From worry to severe anxiety disorders, from run-of-the-mill fears to irrational phobias, we all live somewhere on anxiety's broad spectrum. We fear heights, spiders, bats, public speaking, rejection letters, financial collapse, negative judgments, loneliness, memory loss—the list is endless. And these fears bang incessantly on the tin roofing of our hearts.<sup>2</sup>

For Jesus' disciples, the fear banging most loudly was anxiety about their future with God and God's future with them. To address their worries, Jesus didn't offer simplistic solutions or tidbits of advice. He didn't tell them, "Don't worry. Be happy." He didn't tell them to look deep within themselves for the power and determination to overcome their fears.

In an episode of *The Bob Newhart Show*, Bob, a psychologist, is talking to a woman who has come for her first visit. Bob begins by explaining how he bills—five dollars for the first five minutes, and then nothing after that. The woman proceeds to explain that she fears being buried alive in a box. After taking a few seconds to empathize with her, Bob says "All right, I'm going to give you two words that I think will clear up everything. Just take these two words and integrate them into your daily life, and you should be fine." The woman is excited, and asks if she should write them down. "Oh, you can if you like," he says. "But most people have no trouble remembering them." "Okay," she says, leaning forward. "You ready?" asks Bob. "Yes," she says. "Okay, here are the two words." Bob leans across his desk to put his face close to hers, and says, "Stop it!"<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to his disciples' fears, anxieties, and despair about their future with him and his future with them, Jesus doesn't gather them, look them in the eye, and say, "Stop it!" No, Jesus gives them something much more substantial and eternal. He gives them peace. And not just a generic version of peace that's easy to remember and recite. Not just the "Peace" that one person would utter to another when saying goodbye. No, this peace Jesus offers is more like a bequest, an inheritance. As Jesus prepares to depart, he leaves his followers with an eternal provision called peace.

And according to Jesus, this type of peace is defined partly by what it's not. It's not the kind of peace that comes by conquering your enemy with better or more advanced weapons. In other words, peace maintained through human strength and force. Nor is this peace the kind of security that comes with greater physical and material comfort. Rather, this peace that Jesus is promising is defined by the fact that it comes from Jesus himself. It's his peace. "Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you."

"My peace" means that it's the kind of peace Jesus has exhibited in his life and ministry, and especially now on the eve of his suffering and death. This peace is a centeredness, an inward confidence in the love of God and the purpose of God. It's grounded in the goodness of God, not in outward circumstances. What's more, this peace is what God's people had been waiting for, what the prophets had promised. It was the fulfillment of Israel's hope, the arrival of the salvation, the wholeness, the justice that God had guaranteed. All this has come with Jesus. This is his peace, and he gives it to his followers.

This doesn't mean that his disciples, then and now, will be free of trouble and worry. Actually, Jesus gives his followers this peace to help get them ready for the struggle and hardships that are ahead. Look at his own path to this point. Look at what it has been like for him to proclaim and practice the arrival of God's reign in the world. Why should the community of believers expect anything different? Why should we who believe that Jesus is the way think that the route to glory is a smooth, prosperous path free of cares and costs?

On the contrary, the reason Jesus leaves us his peace is because he knows that we're called to share in his troubles.

In her novel *Hinds' Feet on High Places*, Hannah Hurnard lays out an allegory about progress in the spiritual life, with a particular focus on fear, anxiety, and self-loathing. The story's main character is named Much-Afraid. As one person has summarized it:

Much-Afraid is constantly harassed by her family, the Fearings. They oppress and criticize her all the time. But Much-Afraid loves the Shepherd, who wishes to take her to the High Places, a good land in the far mountains. For her journey, the Shepherd gives her two companions; two sisters named Sorrow and Suffering.

There comes a moment in Much-Afraid's journey when she is tempted to give in to Pride, to listen to his temptation, and abandon her journey. But she calls to the Chief Shepherd, who comes and rescues her. He gently rebukes her that she should not have let go of the hands of Sorrow and Suffering on her journey.<sup>4</sup>

Sorrow and suffering, including our fear and anxiety, are realities that we need to face, trusting that God can use them to enable our spiritual progress. That doesn't mean we should seek out reasons to be afraid and anxious. But it does mean that in the midst of our experiences of them, God can be present, drawing us closer to him and helping us grow deeper into something that's more powerful than fear and anxiety, namely, the peace of Christ, and God's love on which it's founded. No wonder the writer of 1 John reminds us that "perfect love drives out fear" (4:18). In other words, growing up in God's love, maturing in your confidence in God's goodness and faithfulness, leaves less room for fearfulness and anxiety to work in you. As the great reformer John Calvin put it, "for when the love of God is properly known, it calms the mind."<sup>5</sup>

"Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid," says Jesus. This admonition not to fear is the most frequently repeated command in the Bible. One writer says, "It's routinely appealed to as if it were a neat syllogism: *Jesus said, 'do not fear'; Christians obey Jesus; therefore, I am not afraid. God said it; I believe it; that settles it.*"<sup>6</sup> But living out our Lord's command is often not that simple. Many times, it's through wrestling with fear, including our fears about the future, that we make progress in learning how to trust in the presence of God. And one of the primary ways God is present to us is through the community of believers and the way we love one another.

Apologist Michael Ramsden tells about a colleague who once asked his audience to close their eyes and imagine peace. After a few seconds they were invited to share their images. One person described a field with flowers and beautiful trees. Another person spoke of snow-capped mountains and an amazing Alpine landscape. Another person told about a beautiful, still lake. After everyone described their mental picture of peace, Ramsden noted that there was one thing common in them all—there were no people in them. He commented, "Isn't it interesting, when asked to imagine peace the first thing we do is to eliminate everyone else."<sup>7</sup>

Jesus' peace isn't a matter of removing everyone else from the picture and having absolute solitude and serenity, though there's certainly something to be said for having that kind of peace from time to time. Rather, the peace of Jesus bequeathed to us comes in the form of a community of live human beings called the church. True, the peace of Christ is inward and personal. It's an inner assurance about the love and presence of God the Father, revealed in Jesus the Son. This inner assurance steadies the believer in the midst of fear and anxiety. But the peace of Christ is also outward and communal. It takes shape in the life of our congregation as we obey Jesus' command to love one another. Here in this

fellowship, we experience and express peace. Here in this fellowship, we grow in our confidence in God's presence, goodness, and power. And here in this fellowship, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, we hear again Jesus' words, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

---

<sup>1</sup> Ernest White, "Fear and Anxiety." In *Handbook of Themes for Preaching*, ed. James W. Cox (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991) 110.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Palpant, "You Can't Slay the Giant Anxiety with Mere Willpower." Christianity Today. October 19, 2021. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/november/letters-mountain-ben-palpant-anxiety.html> (May 18, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> From Mark Buchanan, *Your Church Is Too Safe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) 88-89. At <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/april/6043012.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Preaching Today. <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2021/august/holding-hands-with-sorrow-and-suffering.html> (May 19, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 11-21 and the First Epistle of John*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 296.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Turner, "The Gift of My Anxiety." Christianity Today. June 23, 2016. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/julaug/gift-of-my-anxiety-fear.html> (May 19, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Ramsden, "Is Christianity a Matter of Convenience?" [www.keswickministries.org](http://www.keswickministries.org) (July 29, 2015).